Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 15 Number 8 October 2018

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 28th October 2018: Ameenpur, 6.30AM. Meeting point: Opp. Mangatrai Pearls, Punjagutta, 6.00AM.

Alongside the other interesting species reported every now and then from Ameenpur are the flamingos. This would be a full-day trip. Carry water and lunch. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: Wednesday, 17th October 2018, 6.00PM: BBC EARTHFLIGHT, Episode 5 – ASIA & AUSTRALIA

Earthflight is a BBC nature documentary covering six continents, and shows some of the world's greatest natural spectacles from a bird's-eye view. The BBC series was created by John Downer and narrated by David Tennant.

BIRDING IS FOR CUCKOOS

Sudhir Moorti

"So, let me get this straight – you work 14-15 hours a day and, to relieve your stress, you go on a 'Birding' trip, where you fly long distances, travel for hours on bumpy roads, go to remote hardly-known places, get barely 3-4 hours sleep every night, walk for kilometres in dense jungles carrying that monstrosity you call a camera, get your blood sucked by leeches, bitten by ticks and God knows what other horrors – and this is what you do willingly?"

I calmly listened to my non-birder friend's tirade, impressed by his breathless rendition, and said, "Yes, this is what we do."

This set off some thoughts in my mind. Aren't we birders crazy – or, better still, Cuckoo?

Why would anyone in a sane state of mind decide to bring upon themselves such hardships? All this to get a fleeting glimpse or maybe a decent shot of a bird?

So why watch birds? I have no straight answer to this one. It's like asking, why climb mountains?

I had once suggested to my wife that she accompany me on one such trip; she gave me a look as if I had lost all my marbles in one fluid motion, and told me to go hang myself from a tree or jump off a cliff. I couldn't help but think, "If it's a fruiting tree, then there could be a lot of frugivores; a cliff could mean some raptor sightings..."

She saw the faraway look in my eyes and naturally walked away in a huff.

Repeated requests to my closest non-birder friends to join me on a birding trip always elicit an unconstitutional response and some anatomically impossible suggestions as to what I can do with my proposal.

So what exactly is a birding trip? It's a ritual, it's a pilgrimage, it's a... it's a... It's a birding trip, nothing else compares. Here's an example of how it goes.

The other day, I was on the phone with a couple of my closest birding friends.

"Let's do Mishmi this time," says my brother-in-arms.

"Mishmi is great, but a tad expensive," I chip in. "How about..."

And this goes on for an hour or so.

My wife later asks me, "You guys planning a trip again?"

I say, "No, no, that's for March."

"But… This is July!" she splutters.

"Yes, we need to plan in advance," I smugly reply.

"You guys are nuts!" she hisses in exasperation.

"Cuckoo," I say, "Cuckoo."

"What???"

"I said we birders are Cuckoo." With that she storms out of the room.

Anyway, the process begins – we finally zero in on a location, the itinerary is built, tickets are booked, birding guides fixed up, rooms booked. Phew!!

And now – we wait!

Daily telephone sessions begin when we dreamily discuss what are the possible lifers that we can get.

Then we shop. A visit to the nearest Decathlon is mandatory. Several other frivolous online purchases are made. Some of which may never be put to use.

Once a friend asked me, looking at a small gadget, "What's this?"

"That's a USB Battery Charger. We use it to charge camera batteries, connecting it to a power bank when we travel to areas where power supply is not available."

"Why are there two of them?" he asked.

"Back-up," I replied.

"OK, what's this?"

"That's a battery grip which fits into the camera, and enables us to use rechargeable AA batteries."

My friend sat in silence for a few minutes, then said, "So you have 4 camera batteries, 1 AC charger, 2 USB chargers, 16 rechargeable AA batteries, 2 AA chargers and 4 power banks. Back-ups for back-ups for back-ups. You guys are mad."

Cuckoo, the word is Cuckoo.

Packing for the trip is yet another sacred ceremony.

I usually withdraw unostentatiously into my spare room (where I stash all my birding stuff) and mull for hours.

Sipper – check, field guide – check, batteries – check, binocs – check...

We have many idiosyncrasies, we birders do. We have lucky charms to which many great sightings are attributed. It can be a ring, a toy, a lucky bag or even a pair of shoes. So obviously we better not forget to pack these, no Sirree.

Sometimes I pack and unpack several times before I am completely satisfied.

Then D-Day arrives, and we are off. A typical birding day involves walking/driving around for 12-14 hours. The birding day starts around 5:00AM, and goes on till about 6:00-7:00PM.

Some great sightings and some not so great ones are a part of the game. There are some species of birds which really get our goat – for example, the Blue Whistling Thrush in the Himalayas, the Red-vented Bulbul and Oriental Magpie Robin closer home. While we would be searching for some particular bird, these species have a habit of turning up every time and irking the bejabbers out of us. Expletives are muttered, names called. We even have our own names for them, which I cannot divulge here for obvious reasons.

Back in the room after a gruelling day's birding, one would think it's over. Not really. The days' Photographs are copied, backed up etc. There's one particular gentleman who takes forever, copying them into at least 2-3 locations/devices before feeling secure… and to top it off, he doesn't budge from in front of the laptop the whole time – I wonder if he can actually see the files getting copied in binary like Neo (from the Matrix movie)! But then we are, to put it mildly, a little paranoid about storing the photographs.

Everyone takes a quick bath and then we settle down to write down the day's bird list, buoyed by some much-needed restoratives. The 'discussion' then begins. Two or more people start writing down the list as one person runs through the field guide.

Sometimes there are disagreements over the ID or some other thing. Lips are pouted, brows are furrowed, but the mention of a rare (for the lack of a better word) species changes the mood. Smiles are back. Glasses are clinked. Cheers!! And then off to sleep, for the morrow brings yet another day of birding, and our hopes of spectacular sightings rise with the morning sun.

Unfortunately, the trip itself whirrs by and is over in a flash (pun intended). We return home with photographs in the digital memories and unforgettable moments etched in the human ones.

And then, the next day, my friend calls me… "Bro, what about Sikkim in November?"

And so it starts all over again.

Cuckoo, the word is Cuckoo.

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IN PURSUIT OF THE BUSTARD IN ALIEN LANDS…

Trip Report – Portugal, July 2018

Text and Photos: Krishna Nukala

A view of Iberia

Time and again my efforts to spot the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) had failed. The search for it in Rollapadu and the tri-state confluence of Telangana, Karnataka and Maharashtra (at Nannaj, Sholapur) over the last three years ended up in vain. GIB is a critically endangered species (only about 150+ remain) and is sighted mostly in the arid regions of Rajasthan and the rest being scattered in other three states. It is one of the heaviest flying birds in the world and experts say that its mass has become its own nemesis, having been hunted for its meat. There are, of course, other reasons too like loss of habitat which has brought it to the brink of extinction in India. According to me, I have to say that its name has become its nemesis – as the story goes, when the birdman of India, Dr Salim Ali proposed the GIB as India's national bird, the government officials mistook its spelling and opposed the scientist's proposal, replacing it with the Peacock as the national bird of India!

You never know when and how the opportunity to fulfil your dream knocks at your door. So, when my sister from the US suggested that we meet in the Iberia for a holiday, I grabbed the opportunity with both hands. I knew that the southern part of Iberia has some great sighting locations for the Great Bustard. But there is a difference. The GIB and the Great Bustard do look very similar, but scientifically they are not one and the same. Nevertheless, a Bustard is a Bustard, and I embarked upon my quest for TGB! More of it later...

Great Indian Bustard (*Ardeotis nigriceps)*	Great Bustard (*Otis tarda)*
Found in the Indian sub-continent. Migratory in nature and flies long distances both for breeding and in search of food. Critically endangered, their numbers are estimated to be below 150 in entire sub-continent. Unless sustained conservation efforts are undertaken, GIB may totally disappear from Indian sub-continent in next 3-5 years.	Found mostly in southern Europe chiefly in grass land areas of Portugal and Spain. Also found in some parts of Mongolia and central Asia. They are chiefly resident birds, and the male sometimes reaches up to 18 kgs. Sustained conservation efforts in Europe have increased their numbers to around 48,000 with about 30,000 in Spain alone.

Bernardo Barreto, a local contact in Portugal who belongs to www.birds.pt agreed to help me sight not only TGB but also, if possible, the Iberian Imperial Eagle (also known as the Spanish Imperial Eagle) – but before that he suggested that there is a lot of birding to be explored in the environs of Lisbon. He suggested that we bird in the Tagus estuary on July 12, followed by birding in the Southern region of Alentejo around Castro Verde and Mertola regions on July 14.

On July 12 morning, we started early. River Tagus is the largest river in Iberian Peninsula and drains into the Atlantic Ocean at Lisbon. The striking part of the estuary is its width, forming into a mammoth lake and blessing Lisbon with a natural harbour. Our destination lay on the other side of Lisbon, for which we had to cross the gigantic 17 km long Vasco da Gama Bridge.

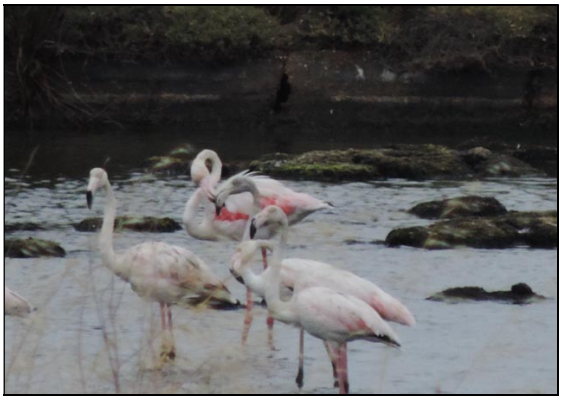
Little Ringed Plover

The birding started immediately after we hit the bridge and one could see the salt pans with the Black-headed Gulls, Black-winged Stilts, Black-tailed Godwits etc in plenty.

I was excited but Bernardo wouldn't allow me to take pictures because one cannot halt on the bridge and driving slow on it would be too risky. "There is plenty of opportunity to shoot when we cross the bridge", Bernardo said.

Taking a left turn after the bridge, we reached Antalaya, a private farm which Bernardo said was the prime place to watch all kinds of birds. Alighting from the car, I looked around and the first things that struck me are the trees. Cork Trees! I have never seen a cork tree earlier in nature and already the bonuses were piling up! Cork (*quercus suber)* belongs to the oak-wood family. Its bark is harvested every 9 years and used for making mostly wine bottle stoppers. Besides, the cork tree also houses many kinds of birds, the most common being Eurasian Nuthatch.

Cork trees at Tagus Estuary



Greater Flamingo

The place was teeming with all kinds of birds. Far away on the salty marshes we could see hundreds of birds like Flamingoes, Black-winged Stilts, Green & Common Sandpipers, Common Redshanks, Whimbrels and many more.

We reached a small pond and I saw a heron not quite like the ones I knew of. This one had a creamy brownish colour and, through the telescope of Bernardo, it looked magnificent with its shining brown body feathers and pale violet, sharp beak with a black tip. Bernardo said that it was a Squacco Heron.

There were Mallards, Little Grebes, Great Cormorants, Little Bitterns, Night Herons, Great Egrets, Great Herons, Eurasian Coots, Common Moorhens and Spoonbills all around.

Squacco Heron (Photo: Faisca)

Common Hoopoe

After spending some time at the ponds we ventured into the cork tree groves. Bernardo heard a short, bursting crickety song of a Reed Warbler in the distance, but try as we might, it was not visible.

Leaving the bird to itself we went on for other birds. Suddenly I came across a brightly colored black-and-yellow gregarious bird and I uttered "Goldfinch". Bernardo corrected me and said that it was the Yellow-crowned Bishop.

Yellow-crowned Bishop

We came across the finches later – both Eurasian Goldfinch and Greenfinch.

Eurasian Goldfinch

Then I spotted a magnificent black-headed, blue-winged bird similar to the Eurasian Magpie and Bernardo confirmed it as the Iberian Magpie.

Little Owl

Birding continued with sightings of Little Owls hiding in the burrows of the cork trees, Crested Larks, Sand Martins, Barn Swallows, Red-rumped Swallows, Yellow Wagtails, Great Tits, Blue Tits, Eurasian Jays, Common Waxbills and so on.

I expected to see the local variant of our Green Bee-eater but couldn't find any. I asked Bernardo about it; he said the Bee-eater spot was not far away and we went in search of it. Ultimately, we found them perched on the electric lines, voraciously feeding on the insects – what a beautiful bird it was! Just replace brilliant hues of blue in place of green in our Green Bee-eater – that's what a European Bee-eater is.

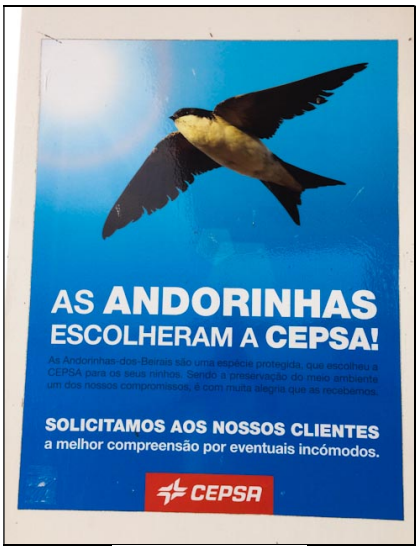
European Bee-eater (Photo: Faisca)

Overall, we covered various birding points on the Tagus estuary at Barroca rice fields, some central gardens at Freeport and old salt pans on the river bank at Ribeira das Enguias. There were more birds as we headed back and I couldn't stop murmuring in my mind, "Birding is so easy here, one has to be just in the place and they are everywhere around you!"

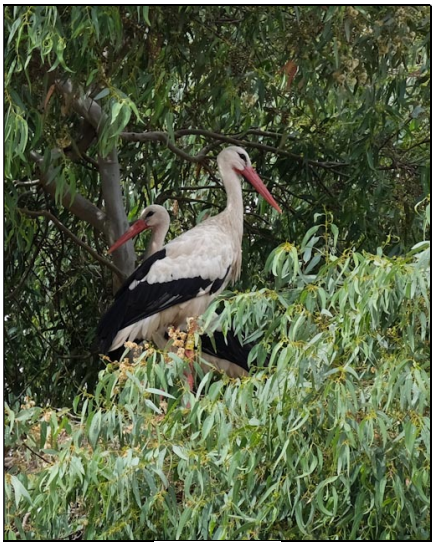
<u>July 14, 2018</u>

Bernardo arrived right on time at 6:00AM. We had to start early as the drive was about 260 km south of Lisbon and en route there were plenty of birding sites to cover. First we halted for petrol at a place called Cepsa-Grandola, and there were hundreds of Swallows and Swifts flying all around. Under the petrol pump roof, there were dozens of muddy nests all around. This petrol pump was owned by Cepsa Oil & Gas Company; they have taken it as a social responsibility to protect the birds and proudly displayed a poster (in Portuguese) reading:

"The swallows chose us –
We ask our clients for the best understanding for any inconvenience."



The CEPSA poster



White Stork

The drive towards Alentejo continued, with cork and olive trees all along on either side of the road. Shortly we entered another private farm at Aparica where a small lake was teeming with White Storks, Mallards, Coots, Red-crested Pochards, Great Crested Grebes and several others. A couple of Lesser Kestrels were to be seen in the distance on the electric lines. Suddenly Bernardo pointed to a bird about 400 meters away perched on top of an electric pole. It looked like an eagle to me and Bernardo as usual corrected me – "Short-toed Snake Eagle". He readied his tripod within seconds, focused the telescope right into its eye and said, "Look".

Short-toed Snake Eagle

"OMG, what a magnificent bird!" I exclaimed. It stood there, not in any hurry to take off. It was a male bird and Bernardo said that it had probably sighted some prey and was waiting for the right moment to strike. So we waited, keeping an eye on the Snake Eagle and looking out for other birds. After about 20 minutes, it took off and dived into the dried grass field below. The next thing we saw was a two-foot snake hanging from its beak as it flew off with its meal. Suddenly the memories of the Bonelli's Eagle hunting the Blackbuck fawn at Rollapadu came to me (Pitta – October 2014 issue).

Bernardo, the guide

Reluctantly we left the area as we had so much to catch up with. We headed towards Castro Verde and Mertola and Bernardo stopped at a place with a big board which roughly translated into – "Bio Diversity Area – Protected zone" with a picture of the Great Bustard. At last we had arrived. This zone has been taken up and protected by "League for Nature Protection" (LPN), an EU body to protect air, water, nature, and the environment. The Portuguese government has allocated 1,700 hectares of land to protect the Great Bustard here. We started looking for the bird and for more than half an hour nothing happened. I was losing hope and beginning to think that my visit was wasted and that I was not destined to see a Bustard in my life. Suddenly Bernardo pointed out to the horizon and with naked eyes I could see the unmistakable heads of two Bustards. They were very far off and even the telescope view was not satisfactory. I was, however, happy that a bird from my bucket list had been ticked off. After a few minutes, the Bustards vanished and they were not to be seen more. By now it was getting late for lunch and Bernardo suggested that we go for lunch at Mertola and look out for other birds.

Eurasian Griffon (Photo: Faisca)

We arrived at a place called Alcaria Ruiva where, on the far-off cliffs, were a big group of Griffon Vultures. There must have been at least 20, and Bernardo informed that this was their usual habitat. Just at that moment, there arrived a huge black vulture, which sat itself at some distance from the Griffons with wings spreading like Dracula's black cloak – it was the Cinereous Vulture. After some time we spotted a Golden Eagle perched on a far off oak tree.

A view of Mertola

Mertola, the Moorish municipality town on top of the hill, lies near Guadiana River which, in ancient times, served as a useful port. Mertola is full of ancient history with records going back to 8th Century BC with intermittent occupations by the ancient Greeks, Romans, Muslims and Christians. On top of the town where the ruins are still being dug out, one can find several Common and Lesser Kestrels in the crevices of the ancient walls. Mertola is famous for protecting Kestrels, and one can see specially made out boxes outside the local homes for these birds to nest.

Lesser Kestrel (Photo: Folheto)

While returning to Lisbon, a different route was taken by Bernardo and I could guess that he had something in his mind. We passed some large tracts of undulating, brown grasslands which I thought were ideal Bustard habitat. I knew that Bernardo was driving the other side of the Bustard National Park and was trying his best for a better view of the Bustards. Dusk was approaching but there was sufficient light. A gentle breeze was blowing from west to east and on the horizon, one could see flocks of White Storks and other birds returning to their nests. Suddenly there appeared a Bustard in full sight, followed by another two. They were much nearer than the two we spotted in the afternoon and I stood still there. All the three were full grown females and remained there for quite some time. I took some pictures and left the place with a humbling feeling.

Great Bustard

Birds of the Day:
July 12 – Squacco Heron
July 12 – no prizes for guessing – the Great Bustard

P.S: In spite of our best efforts, we could not spot the Iberian Imperial Eagle.

A view of the Bustard Sanctuary

The complete list of birds is given below:

Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name	Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name
1	Barn Swallow	*Hirunda rustica*	45	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	*Passer montanus*
2	Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*	46	European Bee-eater	*Merops apiaster*
3	Black Redstart	*Phoenicurus ochruros*	47	European Blue Tit	*Cyanacistes caeruleus*
4	Blackcap	*Sylvia atricapilla*	48	European Goldfinch	*Carduelis carduelis*
5	Black-headed Gull	*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*	49	European Greenfinch	*Chloris chloris*
6	Black-tailed Godwit	*Limosa limosa*	50	European Nightjar	*Caprimulgus europaeus*
7	Black-winged Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*	51	European Roller	*Coracias garrulus*
8	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	52	European Serin	*Serinus serinus*
9	Booted Eagle	*Aquila pennata*	53	European Turtle Dove	*Streptopelia turtur*
10	Black-crowned Night Heron	*Nycticorax nycticorax*	54	Gadwall	*Anas strepera*
11	Carrion Crow	*Carvous corone*	55	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*
12	Carrion Crow	*Corvus corone*	56	Golden Eagle	*Aquila chrysaetos*
13	Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*	57	Great Bustard	*Otis tarda*
14	Cinereous Vulture	*Aegypius monachus*	58	Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*
15	Common Blackbird	*Turdus merula*	59	Great Crested Grebe	*Podiceps cristatus*
16	Common Buzzard	*Buteo buteo*	60	Great Egret	*Casmerodius albus*
17	Common Crane	*Grus grus*	61	Great Spotted Woodpecker	*Dendrocopos major*
18	Common Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*	62	Great Tit	*Parus major*
19	Common House Martin	*Delichon urbicum*	63	Greater Flamingo	*Phoenicopterus roseus*
20	Common Kestrel	*Falco tinnunculus*	64	Green Sandpiper	*Tringa ochropus*
21	Common Linnet	*Carduelis cannabina*	65	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*
22	Common Magpie	*Pica pica*	66	House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*
23	Common Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*	67	Iberian Grey Shrike	*Lanius meridionalis*
24	Common Quail	*Coturnix coturnix*	68	Iberian Magpie	*Cyanopica cooki*
25	Common Raven	*Corvus corax*	69	Lesser Black-backed Gull	*Larus fuscus*
26	Common Redshank	*Tringa totanus*	70	Lesser Kestrel	*Falco naumanni*
27	Common Rock Sparrow	*Petronia petronia*	71	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*
28	Common Sand Martin	*Riparia riparia*	72	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*
29	Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*	73	Little Owl	*Athene noctua*
30	Common Starling	*Sturnus vulgaris*	74	Little Ringed Plover	*Charadrius dubius*
31	Common Stonechat	*Saxicola torquatus*	75	Little Tern	*Sternula albifrons*
32	Common Swift	*Apus apus*	76	Long-eared Owl	*Asio otus*
33	Common Waxbill	*Estrilda astrild*	77	Mallard	*Anas platyrhynchos*
34	Common Wood Pigeon	*Columba palumbus*	78	Montagu's Harrier	*Circus pygarus*
35	Crested Lark	*Galerida cristita*	79	Northern Lapwing	*Vanellus vanellus*
36	Dunlin	*Calidris alpina*	80	Red Kite	*Milvus milvus*
37	Eurasian Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*	81	Red-crested Pochard	*Netta rufina*
38	Eurasian Coot	*Fulica atra*	82	Red-legged Patridge	*Alectoris rufa*
39	Eurasian Crag Martin	*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*	83	Red-rumped Swallow	*Cecropis daurica*
40	Eurasian Griffon Vulture	*Gyps fulvus*	84	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*
41	Eurasian Jay	*Garrulus glandarius*	85	Short-toed Snake Eagle	*Circaetus gallicus*
42	Eurasian Nuthatch	*Sitta europaea*	86	Spanish Sparrow	*Passer hispaniolensis*
43	Eurasian Spoonbill	*Platalea luecorodia*	87	Spotless Starling	*Strurnus unicolor*
44	Eurasian Teal	*Anas crecca*	88	Squacco Heron	*Ardeola ralloides*

Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name	Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name
89	Western Marsh Harrier	*Circus aeruginosus*	94	Yellow Wagtail	*Motacilla flava*
90	Whimbrel	*Numenius phaeopus*	95	Yellow-crowned Weaver	*Euplectes afer*
91	White Stork	*Ciconia ciconia*	96	Yellow-legged Gull	*Larus michahellis*
92	White Wagtail	*Motacila alba*	97	Zitting Cisticola	*Cisticola juncidis*
93	Woodchat Shrike	*Lanius senator*			

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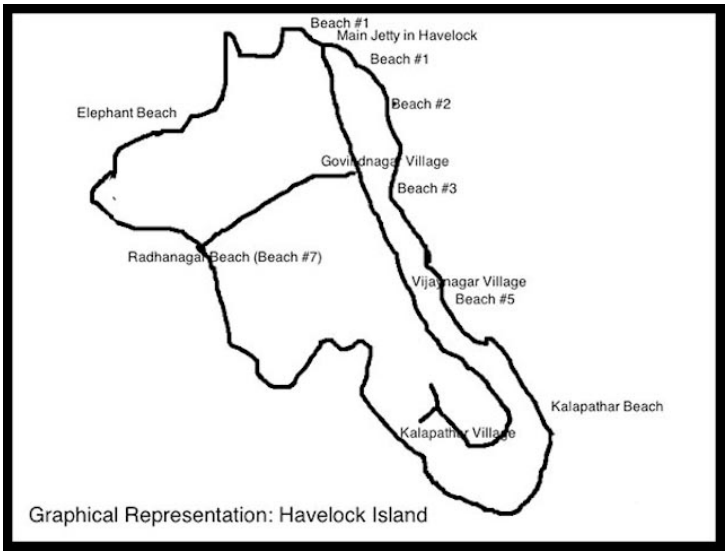
Trip Report – Havelock Island, August 2018

Text and Photos: Lawrence Mathappan



Havelock Island is part of Ritchie's Archipelago, in the Andaman Islands. It is known for its dive sites and beaches, like Elephant Beach, with its coral reefs. The island has one road from the Jetty till the market area of Govind Nagar, where the road divides into two – one road turning right and ending at Radhanagar Beach, and the other continuing all the way to Kalapathar village. On either side of the road are resorts and residences, and the rest of the area is covered with forest. Crescent-shaped Radhanagar Beach is a popular spot for watching the sunset. On the island's east side, rocky sections mark long, tree-lined Vijaynagar Beach. The island's forested interior is home to birdlife such as White-headed Mynas and many woodpeckers.

I was returning to Havelock Island after a birding trip four years ago; this time I was accompanying my daughter for collecting her Dive Master's certificate and her equipment from the Andaman Bubbles, where she had completed her course. We decided that since we were coming to Havelock anyway, we may as well get in a couple of days of birding, if the weather permitted.

August 5, 2018

We landed at Port Blair on the morning of August 5, 2018, and set course to Havelock, which was a one-and-a-half-hour cruise. Having settled into our accommodation at Havelock, we refreshed ourselves, then my daughter introduced me to her friend Amit Adikari. This young self-made birder and naturalist was a big reason this trip was so memorable. Over the next three days, our birding windows were decided by the Rain God and the times he could take off from work. The few hours we could get were amazing as Amit knew where each of the species were found – for instance, he would take us to a small culvert, and say that the Blue-eared Kingfisher was to be found feeding there during the high tide.

With all the rain, I had given up on the night birding we had planned. However, as the rain let up, we started searching for the Owls, though Amit was doubtful of finding any as it was windy and wet.

Since the owls were not to be seen, he said, "Let me show you some water snakes." I agreed and ended up at this culvert under which we found half a dozen snakes hunting fishes. The locals called it the Dog-faced Water Snake *(Cerberus rynchops) (Schneider, 1799)*.

Dog-faced Water Snake

A little further, crawling very slowly on the forest floor beside the road was the Common Cat Snake *(Boiga trigonata),* also known as the Indian Gamma Snake.

Common Cat Snake

Further down, where the road met the beach, we found this beautiful Yellow-lipped Sea Krait (*Laticauda colubrine*) also known as Banded Sea Krait.

Yellow-lipped Sea Krait

As we continued searching for owls along the road, Amit pointed out spots where the Andaman Scops Owl, Andaman Barn Owl etc would normally be found. However, it seemed like it was not my day to see them. Having checked all areas and finding none, we decided to get back as the rain was starting up. As we were driving back, Amit suddenly stopped and switched on the flash light, and I saw the Hume's Hawk Owl! I couldn't photograph it, with the rain coming down; however, we watched this handsome bird till he took off. The night turned out to be a Snakes' Night.

August 6, 2018

The next day we planned for an early morning trip if the rains permitted. Luckily, though it was cloudy, it was not actually raining, and we set off. The canopy was lush green, and sighting birds was difficult. The Andaman Shama could be heard singing, Parakeets of all types were rushing around trying to grab as much food as possible within the rain-effected curfew. We could see glimpses of Long-tailed, Red-breasted and Alexandrine Parakeets, and the fluttering Vernal Hanging Parrots. In the lush green foliage hid the Green Imperial and the Andaman Green Pigeon, barely visible.

Andaman Green Pigeon

Andaman Imperial Pigeon

Violet Cuckoo

On top of a very tall tree sat a Violet Cuckoo framed against the cloudy sky. Red-whiskered Bulbuls kept popping up all around, the Indian Golden Oriole and the Black-naped Oriole were peeping and the Small Minivet was playing hide and seek.

Indian Golden Oriole (female)

Black-naped Oriole

Further down beside the road sat the Andaman Serpent eagle, waiting for the sunshine.

Andaman Serpent Eagle

As we went on towards Kalapathar village the landscape began to change – there were paddy fields, and open land on either side of the road. In one of these open spaces, on a dry stump sat the White-breasted Woodswallow.

White-breasted Woodswallow

Far away on a branch sat the Dollarbird, complaining about something. Beside us, on the electrical wires, we had a Greater Racket-tailed Drongo watching us, its tail swaying in the wind.

Greater Racket-tailed Drongo

Oriental Dollarbird

As we were moving down the road I found a Vernal Hanging Parrot sitting on a telephone pole, dipping now and then into the opening at the top of the pole. It seemed like it had found something to feed on, or was feeding, and this I would find on many of these poles beside the road.

Vernal Hanging Parrot

As we had reached the end of the road we turned back, since Amit had to report to work. We planned to meet in the evening to continue searching for the owls, but the night and next morning plans were washed out as it rained right through.

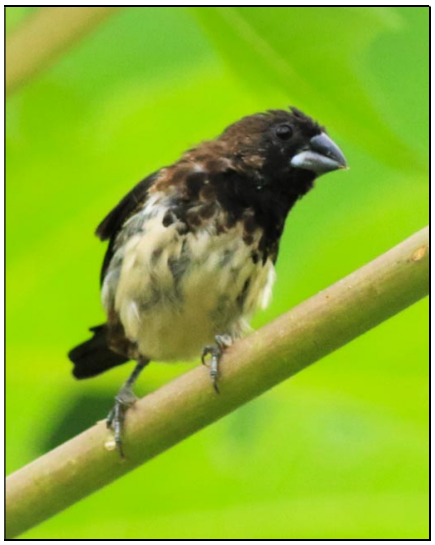
August 7, 2018

Though the morning session was washed out, there was a small pause in the rains in the afternoon. However, with a cloudy sky and the rain threatening to come down any time, we birded close the resort. As soon as we started, we saw the Red-whiskered Bulbul pecking away on a ripened papaya.

Red-whiskered Bulbul

A little further we found the Asian Fairy Bluebird busily trying to pluck a large berry, not bothered that we were watching close by.

Asian Fairy Bluebird



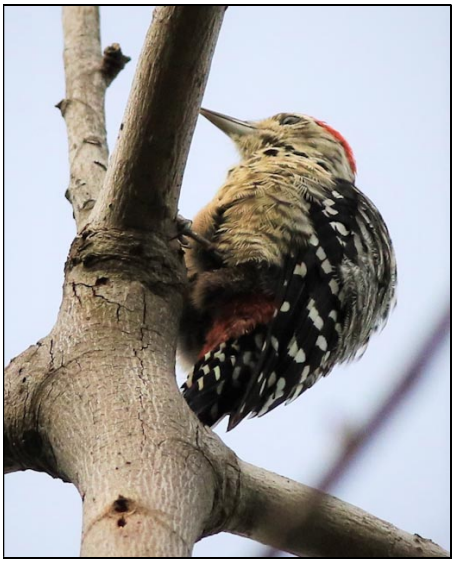
White-rumped Munia

As we moved on, we found another Andaman Serpent eagle watching us from a perch high up under the canopy, as we were walking surrounded by small patches of vegetable fields. In the shrubs we some small birds moving around; on closer scrutiny I realised they were a flock of White-rumped Munias.

An Orange-headed Thrush, an Oriental Magpie Robin, some sparrows, Oriental White-eyes and House Crows were busy searching for food. Out in the open area some Red Collared Doves were feeding.

Red Collared Dove

Having reached the foot of a hill where the vegetable fields ended, we decided to walk around the farms towards the road. A flock of White-headed Starlings could be seen on the tree top along with the Hill and Common Mynas, Emerald Dove, Large-billed Crow and Small Minivets.



Spot-breasted Woodpecker

On a dry tree sat a Spot-breasted Woodpecker preening itself. Suddenly, without any call, the Andaman Shama, holding some insects, landed on a twig near the strings tied above the vegetable plants. As we kept watching it, we realised that the bird had not moved away, even after five to six minutes, and continued to hold the insects in its mouth – then it struck me that maybe we were blocking its path to its nest. Quickly moving about ten meters away, we saw it fly across to where we had stood watching it, and into the thick shrubs.

Andaman Shama

We moved ahead, feeling pleased with ourselves for having understood what the bird needed to do. On the base of a hybrid coconut tree we saw an Olive-backed Sunbird.

Olive-backed Sunbird

As the light was good with the clouds clearing, Amit suggested that we could try looking for the Kingfishers, and we set out to the area where the Blue-eared Kingfisher was usually seen.

As soon as we reached, we saw a Collared Kingfisher streaking across the water, picking up fish from more than one place in a single pass, then sit on a branch munching away in quick time before launching himself once more.

Blue-eared Kingfisher

Collared Kingfisher

It was again getting dark as the clouds had arrived, so we took a break, refreshed ourselves and started for our night birding.

The evening session started with hopes of being granted a *darshan* of at least one of the owl species. Though the weather kept threatening us, we continued and almost at the point of giving up and returning, one of them showed up on his regular watch tower and gave us the pleasure of being in his majestic presence.

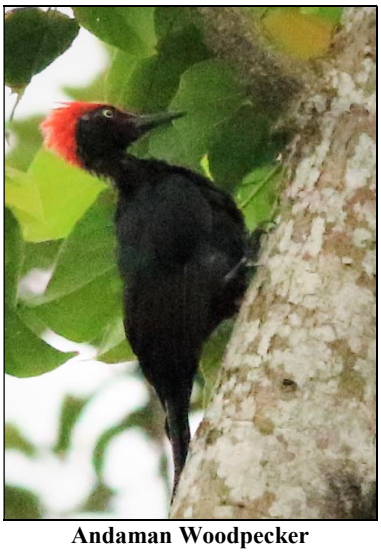
It turned out to be the Hume's Hawk Owl.

Hume's Hawk Owl

He kept looking up to the sky as if telling us, "Take your pictures quickly so that I can go and take care of my own stuff too". As soon as we lowered our camera after a few clicks, he took off silently into the shrubs around. As the drizzle started up we called it a day. As we parted it was decided that we will bird on the Radhanagar Beach side of the island on the last day of our trip.

August 8, 2018

Having boarded the ferry back to Port Blair at 3:30PM, we set off towards Radhanagar Beach. Starting off with a clear sky, far off we saw a juvenile White-bellied Sea Eagle sitting on a tall tree, waiting to be fed. The Orioles, Minivets and White-eyes were busily feeding all around. We left the road and took a trail which led us to an open space surrounded by shrubs and trees. On one of those trees far away sat the bird I had missed on our last trip four years ago – the Andaman Woodpecker.



Andaman Woodpecker

Andaman Coucal

As we went further on the trail, we were welcomed by an Andaman Coucal and a Yellow Wagtail. In the shrubs this little dash of blue and grey kept fluttering from one bush to another curiously trying to find who was encroaching on its territory. The little fellow turned out to be the Black-naped Monarch.

Black-naped Monarch

White-headed Starling

The area was filled with activity. White-headed Starlings, Andaman Drongo, Red-breasted and Long-tailed Parakeets – all were present.

Andaman Drongo

So engrossed were we in watching the activity we hardly realised it was time to pack up and leave for our return journey home.

It had been a beautiful trip – thanks to Amit Adikari, our young guide, who made this trip most enjoyable.

The complete list of birds is given below:

Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name	Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name
1	White-bellied Sea Eagle	*Haliaeetus leucogaster*	11	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
2	Andaman Serpent Eagle	*Spilornis elgini*	12	Common Hill Myna	*Gracula religiosa*
3	Hume's Hawk Owl	*Ninox obscura*	13	Andaman Shama	*Copsychus albiventris*
4	Emerald Dove	*Chalcophaps indica*	14	Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*
5	Red Collared Dove	*Streptopelia tranquebarica*	15	Orange-headed Thrush	*Zoothera citrina*
6	Andaman (or Brown) Coucal	*Centropus andamanensis*	16	House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*
7	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*	17	White-rumped Munia	*Lonchura striata*
8	Large-billed Crow	*Corvus macrorhynchos*	18	Pacific Swallow	*Hirundo tahitica*
9	Grey Wagtail	*Motacilla cinerea*	19	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*
10	Yellow Wagtail	*Motacilla flava*	20	White-breasted Woodswallow	*Artamus leucorynchus*

Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name	Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name
21	Red-whiskered Bulbul	*Pycnonotus jocosus*	37	Dollarbird	*Eurystomus orientalis*
22	Long-tailed Parakeet	*Psittacula longicauda*	38	White-headed Starling	*Sturnia erythropygia*
23	Red-breasted Parakeet	*Psittacula alexandri*	39	Small Minivet	*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*
24	Alexandrine Parakeet	*Psittacula eupatria*	40	Olive-backed Sunbird	*Cinnyris jugularis*
25	Vernal Hanging Parrot	*Loriculus vernalis*	41	Oriental White-eye	*Zosterops palpebrosus*
26	Green Imperial Pigeon	*Ducula aenea*	42	Pacific Reef Egret	*Egretta sacra*
27	Andaman Green Pigeon	*Treron chloropterus*	43	Whimbrel	*Numenius phaeopus*
28	Violet Cuckoo	*Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus*	44	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
29	Black-naped Oriole	*Oriolus chinensis*	45	Collared Kingfisher	*Todiramphus chloris*
30	Indian Golden Oriole	*Oriolus kundoo*	46	Blue-eared Kingfisher	*Alcedo meninting*
31	Asian Fairy Bluebird	*Irena puella*	47	Black-naped Tern	*Sterna sumatrana*
32	Andaman Woodpecker	*Dryocopus hodgei*	48	Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*
33	Spot-breasted Woodpecker	*Dendrocopos analis*	49	Watercock	*Gallicrex cinerea*
34	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	*Dicrurus paradiseus*	50	Slaty-breasted Rail	*Gallirallus striatus*
35	Black-naped Monarch	*Hypothymis azurea*	51	White-breasted Waterhen	*Amaurornis phoenicurus*
36	Asian Glossy Starling	*Aplonis panayensis*	52	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*

Red-breasted Parakeet

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ANNOUNCEMENT

We are happy to announce that the Registrar of Societies has granted permission to the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, to change its name to DECCAN BIRDERS with effect from October 10, 2018, vide his certificate of even date. Henceforth the Society will be known as: ***Deccan Birders*** *(Regd No. 1158/1983). We are in the process of designing a suitable logo for Deccan Birders.*

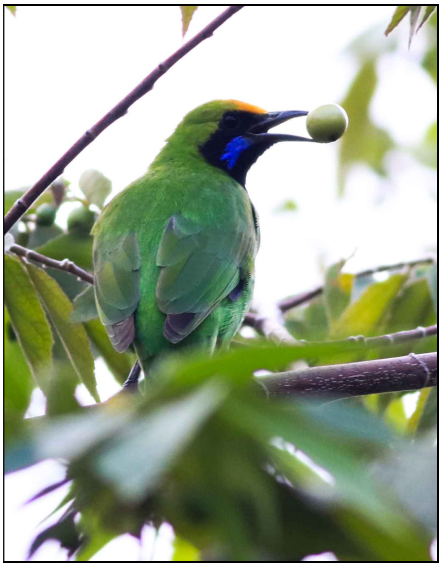
SAD DEMISE

It is with deep regret that we inform of the demise of our Life Member, Mrs Gool R Plumber, on October 17, 2018. On behalf of all our members, our condolences to her family. May her soul rest in peace.

Bird of the Month

Text and Photo: Umesh Mani

Golden-fronted Leafbird (*Chloropsis aurifrons*)



Golden-fronted Leafbird
(Yelagiri, Tamil Nadu, October 21, 2018)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Chloropseidae
Genus: *Chloropsis*
Species: *C. aurifrons*
Size: 19 cm

Description & distribution: The Golden-fronted Leafbird is one of the Leafbird species found in the Indian subcontinent, south-western China, and across to south-east Asia and parts of Indonesia. The adult bird is predominantly green, and has a black face and throat, with a blue throat patch and yellow borders, dark brown irises, blackish bill and feet, a yellowish orange forehead and a blue moustachial line. However, it lacks the blue flight feathers and tail sides seen in the Blue-winged Leafbird. The black colour of the face and throat is duller in female birds and absent in young birds, which also have a plain green head.

Two sub-species are described: *C. a. frontalis,* seen in Southern India, has a narrower yellow border to the face, a blue sub-moustachial stripe and a duller orange forehead. *C. a. insularis,* seen in extreme South India and Sri Lanka, is smaller than *C. a. frontalis*.

Habitat & behaviour: The Golden-fronted Leafbird is generally seen singly or in pairs, or sometimes in small groups, and inhabits deciduous woodlands, evergreen broadleaf forests, forest edges, secondary growth (including bamboo), wooded stands in coffee and tea estates, and wooded gardens, from the up level to around 1,200m (around 1,800m in Sri Lanka). It tends to stick to the canopy where it contorts itself into various acrobatic positions as it forages for spiders, insects, berries, fruits and nectar. The song of the Golden-fronted Leafbird, as with the other Leafbirds, consists of a series of undulating liquid chirps reminiscent of Bulbuls. The call consists of harsher notes, but it is also known to mimic many other birds – for instance, Common Tailorbird, Red-whiskered and Red-vented Bulbuls, Black Drongo, Common Iora, White-breasted Kingfisher, Rufous-backed Shrike and Oriental Magpie Robin – and it often mimics migratory species well after they have left, which indicates a strong ability to retain and retrieve calls.

Nesting: The Golden-fronted Leafbird breeds mainly between May and August over most of its range, but seems to prefer November to February in Sri Lanka. The nest is a loose shallow cup of tendrils, moss, rootlets, etc lined with soft grass or fibres. It is usually well concealed, and usually situated at the extreme end of an outhanging branch near the top of a high tree, making it difficult to access. The usual clutch consists of 2 cream or reddish-cream eggs, with profuse reddish-purple specks all over.

Local name: The Golden-fronted Leafbird is known as *'Pachchaku pitta'* in Telugu, '*Pachai kuruvi*' in Tamil and *'Chhota harrial', 'Chhota harewa'* or *'Sabz harewa'* in Hindi.

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For Private Circulation Only
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